

The West End

The area around Duke Street between Hooft's Run and the base of Shuter's Hill was once known as "West End." Originally subdivided and sold by John and Thomas West in the 1780s, West End became a thriving community well positioned for commerce along the Centerville Turnpike, later Little River Turnpike (now Duke Street). The City of Alexandria annexed West End in 1915, and eventually its distinctive name was lost. With subsequent annexations, the "West End" name has moved to the current western portion of Alexandria.

By 1815, a variety of tradesmen had established their homes and businesses at West End, the junction of two turnpikes, Little River and Leesburg (King Street), and the navigable Hooft's Run. Butchers, tanners, millers, carriage makers, tavernkeepers, wheelwrights, blacksmiths, soap and candle makers chose West End for availability of large land parcels outside the town limits and proximity to customers traveling on the thoroughfares. Within the next 100 years, West End residents also engaged in slave dealing, glassmaking, brewing beer, selling dry goods and food, providing water, as well as growing flowers in commercial_scale greenhouses.



In one of the few views of West End, a large building can be seen in this 1864 photograph taken from Shuter's Hill looking east. Samuel Catts' tavern, known as the Drovers Hotel, catered to those who drove the cattle to the nearby yards for slaughter. Cattle sales, elections and political meetings regularly occurred there.
National Archives

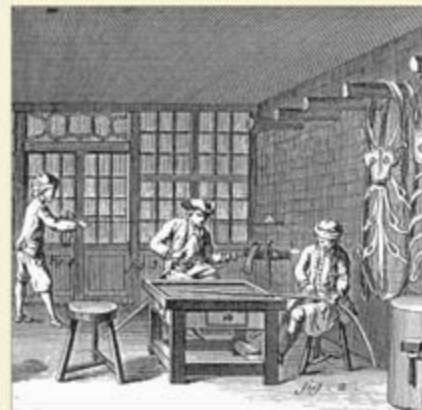


"On New Year's Day, West End is waked up-it becomes an institution. . . men, women and children, mechanics, field hands, dining room servants . . . eating drinking fiddling and dancing; all their own masters, so far as having the privilege of selecting their homes for the next year goes. . . HIRING OUT DAY-January 1st of every year." Employers came from the surrounding counties to hire African Americans for field, manufacturing, service and domestic jobs until the Civil War in 1861. Slough Hospital, a Union Civil War hospital, and Hunting Creek are in the background.
National Archives; Alexandria Gazette January 14, 1860.

Commercial Activities at West End



Butchers predominated in the southern part of West End near Hooft's Run. Lawrence Hooft was one of the first; by 1859, twenty butchers lived and worked here.



A Dediot Pictorial Encyclopedia of Trades and Industries, Dover Publications, 1987; Fireside Sentinel, Vol.III, No. 1.

"West End-a village joining this city and separated from the Corporation limits by Hooft's Run, is a very old place. . . We have heard old people say, that they remembered when West End, was, in one sense, "a shipping port."-for that they have seen a flat bottomed boat come up Hooft's run to the Stone Bridge, land oysters there, and take on board a return cargo."

West End extended from Hooft's Run to the water company and was depicted in the background of the 1864 Birds-eye as a wooded area to the south (left) of Fort Ellsworth on Shuter's Hill.

Plan of the Town of Alexandria, D.C. with the Environs, M. C. Ewing, 1845; West End of Alexandria, C.M.Hopkins, 1879; Bird's-eye View, 1863; Alexandria Gazette, September 28, 1868

While some families continued in West End for generations, there was a great deal of transiency among tradesmen. Charles Jones advertised:

. . . he has again commenced business at WEST END Duke Street. . . COCHMAKING . . . having a number of steady workmen in the different Branches, and all kinds of materials for carrying on his business Extensively. Yet, Jones left the next year and rented his buildings to James Sheehy for his Soap and Candle Manufactory. Sheehy advertised that he kept "a few thousand weight of hogs lard" on hand.

Credit: Alexandria Gazette 2/27/1798; 12/21/1811.



Several archaeological investigations have been conducted in advance of new construction in West End. Archaeologists have discovered the remnants of homes which once lined Duke Street, the West End Brewery, the Virginia Glass Company, Cameron Mills and the burial vault of the West family, for which West End was named. Some of these sites are protected underground. The 60-foot long cellar for cooling beer survives under Duke Street between Dulany and Diagonal streets, and portions of the bottle factory's gas furnaces and flues are under the John Carlyle Street circle.

The brick structure at 1707 Duke is the last remaining West End building. Constructed as a home in 1819, it is remembered as the "Bruin Slave Jail" where African Americans were brought before transport to southern markets for resale.



Alexandria Heritage Trail



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